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ABSTRACT

This book chapter addresses the evolution of integrated classrooms in Manitoba (Canada), with particular attention to two models, the cluster model and the neighborhood school integration model. The cluster model integrates a large number of children with disabilities within a large accessible school. The neighborhood school integration model is described as a technique that integrates special needs students with their chronological-age peers in regular education classrooms in their local community schools on a ratio proportionate to that expected in the general population. The nature, advantages, and disadvantages of each model are described. The paper also describes the establishment of Special Education Management Teams and their decision-making responsibilities. (JDD)

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Chapter 5
Integration Models for Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities

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A decade has passed since establishment in Manitoba of the first mainstreaming opportunities for students with moderate to severe handicaps. This chapter addresses the evolution of integrated classrooms in Manitoba, with particular attention to two effective models, the cluster model and the neighborhood school integration model. The most recent model, that of neighborhood school integration, involves the integration of special needs students with their chronological-age peers in regular education classrooms in their local community schools on a ratio proportionate to that expected in the general population. Both the cluster and neighborhood methods of integration have been instituted and evaluated in Manitoba schools. The nature, advantages, and disadvantages of each model are described. The author also describes the establishment of Special Education Management Teams with the movement of decision-making for special education to the schools from the Department of Special Education. The responsibilities of these teams are described.

Children with moderate to severe handicaps are usually educated in special classrooms, yet educators experienced in services for exceptional children have emphasized the importance of daily, long-term interactions with nonhandicapped peers (Brown, et al. 1978; Lipsky, & Gartner, 1987; Sontag, Certo, and Button, 1979). Only recently have some severely handicapped children been mainstreamed into regular classrooms, usually at the preschool level.

Educational programs for children with physical and mental handicaps in Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba have changed dramatically over the last decade. Prior to 1978, the majority of these children within the public school system were enrolled in segregated settings.

Cluster Model of Integration

In Winnipeg School Division No. 1, movement toward integration began with the selection of a large accessible elementary school (Lord Roberts School) where staff and administration were supportive of the principle of least restrictive environments. Sixty youngsters with handicaps were partially integrated for the first two years of the program.

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An extensive survey was distributed during the spring of 1980 to assess the attitudes of parents and school staff toward integration. The results of this survey (Madak & Chattaway, 1980) demonstrated that both staff and parents overwhelmingly supported the integration concept. Ninety-six percent of the parents of nonhandicapped students and all of the parents of handicapped students believed that both handicapped and nonhandicapped children benefited from attending an integrated setting. When asked if students with mental handicaps should be integrated into the regular classrooms, 66 percent of the parents agreed that they should be integrated.

As a result of these positive findings, and after further staff development and parent education, children with mental handicaps were mainstreamed in a full, day program at the early childhood (nursery and kindergarten) level in September 1981. The success of this program encouraged staff to develop mainstreaming at primary and intermediate levels.

To accommodate children with challenging needs full time in the regular classroom, special and regular teachers have combined classrooms, students and expertise to provide a unique mainstreaming environment. Team teaching is carried out in open area classrooms.

Some of the important elements of the program are as follows.

(a) Students with handicaps and their nonhandicapped peers do not have separate areas within the classroom. Special education students are situated beside their nonhandicapped peers throughout the classroom.

(b) Children having handicaps are integrated for all activities except French and swimming.

(c) A team consisting of a regular and a special education teacher deliver the instruction in each area. Both teachers are involved in instruction of all children, although individual goal setting for students with exceptional needs is the responsibility of the special education teacher.

(d) Cooperative learning is encouraged for many activities. The use of themes, play areas, computers, and learning centers enables children at different developmental levels to participate in the same classroom activities.

(e) Programs in survival reading, leisure and life-skills, and consumer mathematics are taught during the same time period as are language arts and mathematics. The teachers adapt regular social studies, science, health, and physical education curricula to accommodate students with special needs.

The clustering of children with exceptional needs and integration in a large elementary facility has many advantages. Children with significant handicaps can be placed in regular class settings when a special education teacher is included on the teacher team, and teacher aide support is provided. Occupational, physical, and speech therapy can remain on site. Par-

ent and staff support, and professional development are comprehensive and ongoing.

Hill and Whiteley (1985) investigated the frequency of social interactions and on-task behavior at Lord Roberts School. Social interactions occurred among handicapped and nonhandicapped peers. However, it was significantly lower than the number of interactions between nonhandicapped students and other intellectually normal children. In contrast to this result, it was found that students who were handicapped did not prefer to interact with each other. Their interactions were mainly with their able-bodied peers.

On-task behavior provided a measure of student attention to appropriate classroom activities. There was no difference between students who were exceptional and those who were nonexceptional on this measure, indicating that productive educational activities were being maintained at the same level for both groups of students.

Neighborhood School Integration Model

Although there are decided administrative and cost benefits to educating en masse a large number of students who are handicapped, a more progressive model has evolved within Winnipeg School Division No. 1 and other school divisions in Manitoba. The clustering of students was an initial attempt to enable children with severe and multiple handicaps to be educated with their peers. Within the last five years, students in some areas are able to access their neighborhood schools. To the delight of parents and advocates for community living, students with a wide and complex range of educational needs have the same right as do their neighbors to register at their local schools and receive the special supports that are necessary to provide an enriching educational environment.

This integration model began with three schools in Winnipeg School Division No. 1 and has since expanded to over 20 schools in two separate areas of the division. Teachers, previously in segregated classes for students with mental handicaps, learning disabilities, and assessment classes, were reassigned to an itinerant role.

Itinerants were assigned to one or several schools depending on the population and educational needs of each of the special education students. The schools assigned to a itinerant special education teacher were within a couple of blocks, so travelling time was kept to a minimum.

The itinerants spent part of each day in the assigned schools. The role of an itinerant special education teacher differed from that of a school-based resource teacher.

Included in the job description of the itinerant teachers were the following expectations:

(a) to develop and update an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) for each student;
(b) to make curriculum adaptations;

(c) to work with classroom teachers to implement the IEP within the context of regular classrooms;
(d) to provide academic assessment and a diagnostic and prescriptive program;
(e) to provide direct service to students requiring individualized instruction;
(f) to engage in team-teaching with the classroom teacher to individualize within small groups;
(g) to encourage and promote social interactions within the classroom; and
(h) to provide, as part of a teaching team, support and supervision for teacher aides.

The case-load for each itinerant teacher varied according to the level and degree of assistance necessary. The exceptional needs of the students ranged from mild mental retardation to severe behavioral or learning difficulties. Children with autism, multiple handicaps, hearing and visual impairments were being accommodated in their local schools.

Teacher aides were assigned to individual students who required assistance. Classrooms that had students with severe disabilities had full-time teacher aides. Funding for paraprofessionals came from Manitoba Education and was applied through a Low Incidence Funding grant system.

The advantages of this model are numerous. Students, if capable, could walk to school with their classmates. They had a sense of belonging as their families and siblings were members of the immediate community. Acceptance by parents of nonhandicapped children of the integration was more immediate. The children were their neighbors, and the parents of these children were involved in community activities. The number of students in the school with any type of disability reflected the natural proportion, that is, the percentage that would have been expected in the general population. The threat of overloading the regular classroom with exceptional children was not apparent.

There were definite benefits to the classes involved in integrated programs. The instruction of children without disabilities was likely to be enhanced by the additional personnel assigned to assist the teacher. Because specialized resources like individualized instruction, cooperative learning, and computer assisted instruction were used, regular education students could benefit from the emphasis on differentiated instruction.

Disadvantages were mostly administrative and were related to finances. With exceptional children being placed in individual classrooms, the need for more teacher aide assistance was necessary. This remained a costly item for the school division. Accessibility was necessary and costly as ramps and elevators were needed in older, two-story buildings. A larger number of teachers and principals required professional development, which can be draining on budgets and other professional development priorities.

Elementary Schools Special Education Management Team

With an emphasis on community integration, principals have assumed a greater responsibility for decision-making in special education. Through a decentralized, divisional movement and initiative from groups of administrators, special education management teams have been organized geographically in the division. The movement away from centralized decision-making for special education students was a positive outgrowth of neighborhood school integration. Full responsibility for the education of students with challenging needs remained with the schools rather than with the Department of Special Education.

Membership of each management team varied, but was usually made up of principals, special education itinerant teachers, and a consultant from special education. Responsibilities of each management team were developed to reflect the needs of each area.

One management team assumed the following direction in their mandate:

(a) to facilitate professional development opportunities in the area of special education;
(b) to develop and enrich the special education resource center in the area;
(c) to develop a library of software and peripherals to enhance individualized programs for students with challenging needs;
(d) to monitor case-loads, supports, and staffing of special education programs in individual schools, and to respond to changing needs of staff and programs, as necessary;
(e) to act as a liaison between special education itinerant teachers and administration;
(f) to receive and review requests for additional special education teachers and programs;
(g) to fulfill an advocacy role to promote principles of special education integration and appropriate services of school environments;
(h) to review and evaluate the special education integrated model on a continuous basis;
(i) to provide information to parents and the general public about special education students. To heighten awareness and develop promotional material, such as a brochure, information workshops, programs, etc.;
(j) to review teacher aide positions within the mini-area (recognizing that the allocation of positions, initially, is a division responsibility);
(k) to clarify policies and procedures and to ensure that all staff are current in their knowledge of these in the area of special education; and
(l) to review and rank order lists of accepted students for special education placement.

In examining the development of integration in Winnipeg School Division No. 1 over the last decade, it is apparent that a commitment to-

ward exceptional children has been a priority. Creative planning and reorganization of special education services has provided students with challenging needs a more enabling school environment. The process has not been without its setbacks and controversies. Both integration models have been replicated in various school divisions in the Province providing enriched environments to exceptional students in Manitoba.

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